

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With health care costs rising and placing a greater burden on American families, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) voted for Michelle's Law (H.R. 2851), a bill that he co-sponsored to address a specific unjust practice that affects individuals trying to put themselves or their children through college. This legislation ensures that dependent students who take a medically necessary leave of absence do not lose health insurance coverage.} — {"Allowing insurance companies to take students off their parents' plan because of an illness puts an unfair and unnecessary financial weight on families, making it difficult for affected students to afford the care they need as well as the education they are pursuing," said Congressman Sestak. "I entered politics primarily because of my passion to improve healthcare in this country. While living in a pediatric ward with my daughter, I saw other families who could not afford critical treatments, while my family received needed care through the military's health plan. I am committed to advocating for affordable healthcare for everyone, particularly for our youth. In addition, when you consider the importance of a post-secondary education in today's global marketplace, this law not only does the right thing morally, but also helps affected individuals get the education they need to positively contribute to our economy."

Specifically, this legislation amends the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA), the Public Health Service Act, and the Internal Revenue Code to prohibit group health plans from terminating coverage of students who become severely ill and take a certified medical leave of absence. This allows students ages 18-24 to stay on their parents' health insurance for up to one year.

The bill is inspired by, and named after, Michelle Morse, a New Hampshire college student who died of colon cancer in 2005. Michelle's doctors had recommended that she reduce her course load while undergoing chemotherapy treatments, but doing so would have caused her to lose health care coverage under her family's insurance. Michelle continued attending classes full time as she struggled with treatments, tragically losing her battle later that year.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.*